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THOUGHTS ON LIFE, DEATH, AND DREAMS

by

Magda Herzberger

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So often in our meditative states of mind we wonder what happens to us after we are gone. Life is so beautiful, it is never easy to depart from it. Everyone hopes to live a long time and all of us try to leave something behind us, because the thought that we are falling into oblivion at death is terrifying. We don't want to believe that, because it is too frightening a thought. So we try to do some things in life to be left behind and remembered, and each of us does it in a different way: some people leave their artistic creations behind in paintings and drawings; some leave behind their thoughts in writing; others maybe leave behind their beautiful handiwork. We hope that by leaving all of these behind we are going to be remembered. But will we indeed be remembered? Does not time efface and obliterate all our traces and as life goes on are we forgotten? Nevertheless, we still try to create something, hoping we will not be forgotten. Great composers were not forgotten: Mozart, Beethoven, and others. Great writers and great poets like Schiller, Goethe, Shakespeare are remembered through their artistic creations. By the fact that their works are performed, their spirits are alive, and they are with us beyond their death. They remain alive through centuries, but not everyone is a Mozart or a genius. What happens to us who are not geniuses? So, we have to have a strong faith and believe that somehow our spirits are going to survive, because otherwise we would lose all our motivation and desire to create something which we can call our own, and through which we are marking our identity and reveal ourselves.

Each religion stresses eternity. The Buddhist and the Hindus believe in reincarnation, claiming that our soul travels and then is reborn in another body. In the Christian religion there is the belief that there is a heaven and we obtain eternity. We will deserve the heaven or the hell according to our actions in life. If we are righteous, we go to heaven; if we are great sinners, we go to hell. But has anyone come back from heaven or hell to us, if there is a hell or a heaven? But if you have a strong belief in God, and I think that regardless of any religion God is the central force which moves everything (it was He who created the universe and us), you believe there is an afterworld.

I am of Jewish faith and in our religion we believe there is an afterworld. Actually, we believe that God is judging us in the afterworld according to whatever we did in our life. So whatever good things you do in life, you are going to be rewarded for it, and the ports of heaven

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are going to be opened for you. We must believe in the survival of the spirit. How could we otherwise accept the loss of our loved ones? We believe that although our loved ones are not with us, and their physical bodies cannot survive (from dust we emerge, to dust we return), their spirits escape their bodies and rise above time and age, standing on life's stage defying finality.

It was very painful for me to lose many of my family members in the German concentration camps. During World War II I was a captive there myself for one and half years because of my Jewish faith. My mother survived, but I lost my father and my beloved uncle. My uncle, who was a fencing champion, did not have children of his own. He treated me always like his own daughter and, therefore, when I was five years old he wanted me to learn to fence, and he was very strict with me. He wanted me to excel because he considered me his daughter. It was like having two fathers. I loved my uncle and I started fencing when I was five years old. When I was a teenager I was participating in fencing competitions. At age eighteen I was taken to the German concentration camps with my family., When we were separated in Auschwitz my father said, "Remember the art of love, forgiveness, and tolerance. Remember your father and take care of your mother. Cherish and respect her." My uncle said, "Remember; pain increases your endurance." So many times I was complaining when I was fencing that my muscles were sore and it was hard for me. He always said, "Pain increases your endurance." In the German concentration camps when I was doing horrible slave labor and I lived in pain, that statement became the secret of my survival. I said to myself, "Pain increases my endurance and because of that I have to tolerate pain. I have to be a survivor."

My mother survived the German concentration camps. She came back and I had my mother for many years as a single parent. God rewarded me. She died in 1994 at age ninety-three. I lost my father in the German concentration camps in Dachau and I also lost my uncle there. My parents and my uncle were closer to me that anyone else in the world. I'm a part of my mother and father. I never overcame the loss of my father. I had dreams about him. I never overcame the loss of my uncle either, and in my dreams, I could see him and talk to him. The loss of my mother is still very fresh. The wounds that I feel are still painful. I still mourn all my family members who perished, all my uncles, aunts, and cousins. It was very hard for me to lose my mother because we were very good friends. She was ailing some years before she passed away and I took good care of her. Sometimes she said, "You know you are like a mother to me. You are my daughter, but you are also like a mother to me." She deserved the best care I could

give to her. I would give my heart to her. When she died I went through hard emotional suffering. Also, at that time, my husband retired — he had been a neuro-surgeon for forty-five years. My daughter was recovering from surgery. Then I had an accident; I lost a part of my fingertip on my right hand, on my middle finger, and I went through surgery. Then, we decided to move from the Midwest where we were living in Dubuque, Iowa for eighteen years. I had to face leaving my family and friends behind. I was also a public speaker there for many years.

It was very hard for me to take all that and in 1994, just a few months after I lost my mother (I buried her on March 27, 1994) I had a dream about her. Somehow I feel that her spirit is still alive. Maybe we communicate with our loved ones through our dreams. What are dreams? We can never really explain them. We create fantasy worlds. But in my dreams it is the only time I can see my deceased loved ones. So although they are no longer with us anymore, I feel that their spirits are always with me. The spirit of my mother, of my father, and of my uncle and the spirits of all my deceased relatives are always with me. I see them in my dreams. I have very strange dreams where we communicate with each other and they try to leave messages behind which I never forget. I remember them through the years. I'm not a very young person anymore. I'm already 71 years old. I have to believe in the eternity of the spirit because the older we get we come closer and closer to our departure from this world.

I would like to share with you, my readers, some of my dreams, and, maybe, through this you will understand that I do believe in the life of the spirit. Actually, I'm a very spiritual person because I am a writer, and what is writing? Writing stems from ideas, from thoughts. What are thoughts? Thoughts stem from our spiritual self, from the depths of our souls.

Shortly after my mother died, I had a very strange dream about her. I was dreaming that I was walking on a very bad road. It was filled with stones and it was very uneven. As I was going on, it got worse and worse. It became muddy and the mud got deeper and deeper. I was carrying a heavy knapsack with me. I was heading somewhere and I didn't even know where I wanted to go. I wanted to go away somewhere and, in my dream, ~~and~~ I didn't know why. Where would be the place of my destination? I had two purses, which was unusual, because normally I don't carry two purses. I couldn't understand why I took two purses along. The road became muddier and muddier. I stopped and I was thinking, "I can't take this anymore. I just can't go on that road anymore. What should I do? I don't even feel like going back on that road." As I was debating what to do, suddenly, I could see my mother appearing next to me.

I was so happy to see her. In my dream, I didn't realize that she was dead. She looked so strong and filled with vitality. I was thinking, "Oh my God, It is so strange that my mother at age ninety-three is filled with so much vigor." She looked at me and said, "My child, you look so tired and you have such a heavy load with you. Two purses? What for? Give me all your load. I will carry it for you."

I said, "Mother, you want to carry, at your age, my load? Don't you see how heavy it is? And look at this road. I can hardly walk on it!"

She said, "Just give it to me. We are going to manage."

To my surprise, my mother took all my load, my knapsack and my two purses, and she said, "Let's just go a little bit more."

I said, "I can't go anymore on this road."

My mother said, "You have to. You have to. Don't give up. I came to help you."

The road became worse and worse and muddier and muddier. It was covered with stones mixed with mud. I said, "Mother, let's face it. We can't go on this road anymore."

My mother said, "Oh no, we are not going to give up. We are going to go back and take the car."

"But, mother, you have never driven a car in your life. How are you going to drive a car?"

"Leave it up to me. I can solve it."

My mother disappeared with my packages and purses. I was calling, "Where are you? Where are you? Don't do it. Don't do it. You're going to perish. Even I cannot go."

I could see my mother coming, driving a car. I couldn't believe my eyes. She opened the car door and said, "Hop in. I already placed your stuff ~~in~~ inside. It's going to be a lot easier to go with the car."

I said, "Mother, you've never driven in your whole life."

"Leave it up to me. I can handle it. You know I did handle many things in my life. Didn't I handle the loss of your father when I came back and got a job to survive? I did handle it. Before the war when your father was alive I didn't have to do that, I only took care of my family and I was a housewife to you and your father"

So, somehow, I had confidence in my mother. I thought, well, my mother is a strong-willed person. She always manages to come out of the most difficult situations. Maybe she has

a point. So I steppd into the car and my mother was stepping on the pedal and was driving. I couldn't believe it. She started driving faster and faster and I said, "Mother slow down because we are going to have an accident."

I could see a car parked at a small distance from us. I said, "Slow down mother, because you are going to bump into it."

My mother slowed down, but, nevertheless, we bumped into the car. We didn't hit the car too strongly, but, nevertheless, we bumped into the car and I could see that there were people in it. I said, "You see, mother, you should not have driven. What are we going to do now? You've never driven a car. You don't have a license. We have to call the police."

She said, "Leave it up to me. I can handle it."

I was wondering how my mother was going to handle the situation this time. Then, I saw some people coming out of the car who looked like they were of Italian origin: a man, his wife, and two children. The man came to me and he was very angry and upset. He asked, "How old is you mother?"

I answered, "My mother is ninety-three."

He asked, "Does she have a license?"

I said, "No."

"You let your ninety-three year old mother, drive without a license? couldn't you drive yourself? Aren't you ashamed to do this?" He wanted to call the police. I didn't know if there even was a police station nearby.

Then my mother said to me, "Let me handle this."

I said, "Mother, I don't know how you're going to handle this because we are going to get now in deep trouble. My license can be revoked because I let you drive without a license. We're going to end up at the police station."

She got out and went to the family. To my surprise, I couldn't believe my eyes, the man said, "Ah, you are Mrs. Moses (my maiden name was Moses). We knew your family."

I was wondering how they knew my family. We were living in Romania, in Transylvania, at that time. How could they know my parents. Nevertheless, the man said, "We knew your husband. He was such a nice man."

My mother said, "Oh, how nice to see you," and they started conversing. My mother introduced me. She said, "This is my daughter."

"Ah," they said, "This is your daughter?"

My mother said, "I wanted to help her. Maybe I should've slowed down a little faster so I wouldn't hit you. I'm really sorry about this."

"Oh," the man said, "Don't feel sorry. We are so happy to see you. Maybe it was meant to happen because if you wouldn't have bumped into us, we would have never had the opportunity to meet and to talk to you."

They started talking. They were the biggest friends. Anyway nothing much happened and they said goodbye to each other. The man stepped into the car and drove away with his family. Then my mother said to me, "Well, you see, I could handle the situation. You've also handled many situations in your life. What is the trouble now that you cannot keep on going on this road?"

I said, "Mother, I am tired. Somehow I have no motivation, no desire to go on."

My mother said, "Well, you have to do it."

My mother then got out of the car and took my two purses and knapsack. She said, "Look ahead. Don't you see the road changed? We traveled together on the hardest part of it."

Indeed, there was a beautiful paved road, in front of me. I couldn't understand how this road that was muddy and filled with stones and so difficult to pass, suddenly changed. I asked my mother, "I can't understand mother. How come this road changed?"

My mother answered, "Can I tell you a little secret?"

"Yes mother."

"You know that this road wasn't as bad as you had seen."

"Well, I've only seen mud and stones."

"Yes, but I have seen something else. This road is a path to the place you really wanted to come. This was just a hard passage in your life. I knew it was hard to take it and that's why I came to help you. But from now on you can handle it on your own."

"Mother, that load I had was so heavy and I don't know what I put in these purses. I feel so tired."

"Well," she said. "Your load isn't so heavy anymore. Just try it."

I tried my load and said, "How come it seems so much lighter now? How come that it seemed so heavy before?"

My mother said, "Because you needed a little help to lighten your load and I came to

your assistance."

"Mother, would you like to stay with me? I want you to stay with me. You've been away for so long, I missed you."

"I might have been away from you for a long time, but you didn't realize that my spirit was always beside you. I knew exactly, at all times, what you were doing. How else could I come to help you?"

I felt that indeed, my mother had a point. Then suddenly it struck me: "My God, my mother died. This is her spirit, and her spirit is always watching over me."

My mother looked at me and she said, "I know you are right, I know what you are thinking. What you are thinking is very true. Good bye my child."

She disappeared. I woke up in my bedroom, and my eyes filled up with tears. The picture of my mother is always at my dresser. I picked up her picture, looked at her, gave her a kiss, and I said, "Mother, I know that the spirit never dies. You always told me that, but now I truly believe it."

That was one of my dreams with my mother, but then a year later, I had another dream about her. Her spirit came to me again. In my first dream probably she wanted to remind me that no matter how many difficulties we encounter in life we have still to go on and have the hope that we can attain what we want to and we can overcome our obstacles and difficulties. But in my second dream, my mother had another message for me. One that I will never forget and I will keep it in my mind for the rest of my life. In that other dream, I was dreaming that I was in a big place, outdoors, and there was some celebration going on. Somebody came to me and said, "Well do you see all these people gathering here?"

I asked, "What kind of celebration is this?"

He said, "Oh, this is not a celebration, these people are coming to hear you speak."

I said, "To hear me speak? What about?"

"You are a public speaker, you are a poet. They heard about you and they want to listen to your poetry recital They also want to hear your thoughts on life."

I saw the people gathering and I was just about to start my presentation, when everyone was looking at me. I started telling them, "Life and death are the two inseparable components of man's destiny. Each day somewhere the birth of a new life is celebrated and each day somewhere the mourners close the eyes of those who depart from this world forever." I started

to recite my poem "Prologue".

Life is but a brief encounter
With the joys of earthly fun-
On the wheel of fate
Our destiny is spun-
Delicate strands of ecstasy
Mixed with coarse fibers of doom and agony
Are woven on the loom of existence
By the invisible hands of Almighty God-
The finished cloth,
Stamped with our blood
Never becomes our property-
We are allowed only
To take a short glimpse
Of it's beauty,
Before death takes it away
At the end of our last day-

After my recital I started talking about life and death. "Life is the greatest miracle created by God, and the most precious gift entrusted to humanity to be cherished and respected." "What is death? Death is the ultimate fate of man." As I was just finishing the phrase, "Death is the ultimate fate of man," I could see my mother coming. At that moment I was so shocked I couldn't even utter a word. At that moment, I knew my mother came to listen to me and to talk to me. In my dream, I realized that it was only her spirit coming to meet me because I was aware that my mother wasn't alive anymore. I could see that she had some difficulty coming to me because of the crowd. She spotted me. She was dressed in her favorite beige colored spring coat. She lived in Israel for many years and it was purchased there. Many times I wanted to get her a new spring coat, but she loved that one. She was attached to that coat, partly because it was from Israel. She got that coat when she was much younger. It was interesting that in my dream my mother was so much younger than at the time of her death. She had hardly any gray hair. She looked to be the age she was when I found her upon my return from the German concentration camps, when she was forty-six years old. She always had beautiful black wavy

hair, and a nice light complexion. She had an interesting combination of light complexion and very dark hair. She was a very beautiful woman. I would say she looked more middle aged. I wanted desperately to meet her and to talk to her. She spotted me, and she looked at me. I left my place where I was talking, I could not continue my recital. The crowd was surprised but I couldn't care. I was trying to get towards her to meet her. It wasn't an easy situation because there were so many people that it seemed an impossibility to get through all those people. But in my dream, it seemed that I was floating towards her. The crowd was making space for me to get there, and my mother was coming from the opposite direction and we were headed towards each other. All the way I was thinking, "What will I say to my mother when I meet her? I hope I will have enough time to talk and tell her all my thoughts and how much I miss her and how much I love her." Finally, at one point finally we reached each other and we embraced each other. I was holding onto her like a fruit to a tree and to my great surprise I couldn't say a single word. I found no words for the love and happiness I felt seeing her. My mother couldn't say a single word either. We were just holding each other. But there was a spiritual communication between us. I knew what my mother wanted to say, and she understood what I wanted to say. We both wanted to say "I love you, I love you, I love you." But there was a message going beyond that. Although my mother did not say anything, I could feel what she wanted to say, "Preserve the love in your heart, I will always love you beyond the grave. I am always with you. My spirit is always with you."

I wanted to say, "Mother I miss you, I love you." But she understood my thoughts. Finally, I looked and I realized that the crowd was looking at me and probably they were thinking I was insane. I was holding and hugging somebody and they didn't see ~~anybody~~. Then I asked my mother, "Mother, can anyone see you?"

My mother answered, "No, no my child nobody can see me except you, because this is my spirit that has come to you."

I was thinking, "Oh my God, what impression do I make here as a speaker? Everyone is looking at me like I am crazy." On the other hand, I felt "I don't care. If anyone will think I am insane, if anyone will go away and they will not come back anymore to listen to me, I could care less, because I am holding my mother, she is here with me. This is more important." At that point, I woke up, and even in my waking state, I could almost feel that my mother was still with me. I knew that her spirit was always with me. Probably she was right there in my room even in

my waking state. But maybe at that time I couldn't see her. I felt that her spirit always follows me and watches over me.

These are some of my dreams about my mother, but I have also other dreams with her. Just recently I had an interesting dream with my mother. In my dream, she was very ill, and she was lying in bed, her eyes were closed. She wasn't conscious. She looked just the same way when I was sitting with her on her deathbed. I was holding her hand. In my dream, I did not know that my mother had died. I wasn't aware of that. But I was aware of the terrible feeling that my mother was dying. As my husband is a physician, I went to him and I said, "Come and help my mother, she seems to be unconscious. I want to talk to her, maybe you can help her by giving her some medication."

My husband came in, looked at her and he said, "There is no medication for that. Your mother is dying. She is unconscious, she can't talk to you anymore no matter how much you desire. You have to accept that there is a time when everyone has to go from this earth."

But I could not accept that. I was sitting by her bed, and I said "Mother I want to talk to you. Please don't die, I want to have you around. You have been my single parent through all these years. Please talk to me. I know you are not dead yet."

There was a silence, but then my mother opened her eyes and she looked at me. She said, "It's true, I'm not dead yet. But I am dying."

I said, "Oh mother please don't die. Please don't die. Please live a little longer, I love you so. I don't want to lose you."

"My child, don't cry, someday we all must go."

"No mother no, I want you to stay longer."

"Look I am sick, I am bedridden. I am not like I used to be before. If you truly love me you have to let me go. Life had no meaning for me anymore."

"Mother, I want you to live for me."

"I will always be with you, even if I die."

"Mother, how can you be with me after you die? You are going to be buried in the ground and I will never see you. Then I won't be able to touch you, to embrace you."

"My body may lie deep in the ground, but my spirit will always follow you around."

Then my mother closed her eyes.

I said, "Mother, mother, wake up." But there was no answer. Then I heard a voice in the

room. It was my mother's.

"I am at peace now. Accept the things you cannot change. My spirit will always be with you. From now on we are going to communicate only on a spiritual level. Goodbye, my child, be at peace with yourself. If you truly love me, you will let me go. You don't want me to suffer longer."

I thought that my mother is right, I don't want her to suffer longer. I don't want her to live just in suffering. It would be very wrong for me to demand that. I embraced my mother on her deathbed. She didn't talk to me anymore, she fell into a deep coma, but I was hugging and kissing her, and tears were running down my cheeks. I felt such a terrible emotional pain. In my soul, a feeling of terrible loss that words cannot describe. At that point, I woke up and I was still crying. The tears were still running down my cheeks. I was thinking; "My mother is dead, but in my dream her message to me was again the same as in all my dreams."

"The spirit never dies."

So I knew that her spirit will always be with me. I lost her physical body, but not her spirit. We are the children of God, we carry within us the spark of eternity.

The physical body of my father was also lost, just like my mother's. But his spirit will live with me forever. After all, I am a part of him. He died many years ago, in the German concentration camps. He was a victim of the Holocaust, just like I almost was one and just like many of my family members, and six million Jewish people were also the victims of the Holocaust. How can I ever forget my father? He was a gentle man, who believed in the power of words and not of blows. He taught me to have love for mankind, to have compassion in my heart, to respect my parents and my grandparents. He also encouraged me to have a goal, to be a professional person, to further my education. He was the one who instilled in me the desire to go to medical school. He said, "If you are Jewish, take a profession which is needed." I had an interest myself in medicine. Naturally, circumstances didn't allow me to finish medical school, except two years of it. But things change in life, and many times we are changing with the circumstances. War creates a lot of havoc in every person's life. War creates destruction. I hope there will be a time when there will be peace on earth, although I doubt it, because greed and a search for power is built into humans. But my father was a peace loving man and he had a great love for his family. He never had to tell me what love is because he demonstrated it in each of his actions what love is. He was a hard working man, and he had a heart of gold. He

demonstrated so much thoughtfulness and affection toward my mother and toward me—I was an only child, he loved us dearly. I remember what he said to me when we were separated in Auschwitz, "Practice the art of love, forgiveness, and tolerance." I promised to him that I will always fulfill his wish. I know that his spirit is following me around, just like my mother's spirit, just like in my dreams, when my mother said that her spirit will always follow me around. I can see my father only in my dreams. In my dreams, many times I don't even realize that he's dead. Several years ago, I had a dream about him. I had a number of other dreams, but in many of my dreams about him, he also leaves a message behind, which I always follow. It stays with me for the rest of my life. I'm not a young person anymore. I think of him very often. In that dream, I was in a big ballroom, and the ballroom was filled with people. I was just wondering, why are they dressed up so informally for this occasion? Normally, in a ballroom you expect people to dance, you have some music, and people are usually dressed more formally. Usually women are wearing dresses and men are wearing suits. But it was strange, that although it was a ballroom, people were dressed in informal clothing. And although there were so many people present, there wasn't even a dance floor where you can really dance The whole ballroom was so packed with people you could hardly move. I was wondering why I was in that ballroom. What was I doing there? I was wondering who those people were, I didn't know anybody. I was also wondering why I went there, and for what reason. I didn't even know if I had an invitation, or why I was in that place at all. Then as I was looking around, trying to find some familiar faces, I could see my father walking in. He was at the far end of this huge room packed with people. I was so happy. He looked so young. He looked like he did just before he was taken to the German concentration camps. He looked like just before we were separated from each other in Auschwitz. He was forty seven years old at that time, and he always looked younger than his age. When I was a teenager and I was walking with my father, people thought he was a suitor, because he looked so young for his age. He was a good fencer, too. My uncle, who was a fencing champion of Romania, was training my father too. His brother had to be in the competitions, and because of that he was always in excellent shape. He was a slender and handsome man. I was wondering why he was wearing his favorite winter coat considering that the ballroom had a warm temperature. He loved that winter coat. It had a little mini fur on the collar. I grew up in the northern part of Transylvania, which is part of Romania at the present. At the time of our deportation, it was part of Hungary. Our city, the city of Cluj, where I grew

up, was the capital of Transylvania, and was surrounded by the Carpathian mountains and the Transylvanian Alps, and because of that we had quite a cold climate. We had very hard winters, and short summers. The snow didn't melt from November until the end of March. We had beautiful lakes, I ice skated on the lakes. My father was always cold in winter, he suffered from the cold. He had this nice wool winter coat with a fur collar that he could pull up to his face. At that time we didn't have many cars so he walked to his office. He would come into the house, in winter, snow covered. His fur collar was pulled up to his face and he had a fur cap on his head. Every time he came home from work, he always was carrying something for me: some chocolates or candy. When I was a very young child, I always looked at my father when he came into the house, sometimes it seemed to me that he didn't bring me anything. But then he would tell me to check his pockets, and I would always find some small presents for me. He taught me what love is. I remember the greatest lesson in love he gave me when I was three years old. It was my mother's birthday, I went to my father and I said, "Daddy, I need money."

"What do you need money for?"

"Because my mother has a birthday and I want to get her a present."

"Oh you don't need money for the nicest present you can get."

"What can you get without money, what present?"

"Oh" he said, "you can give your mom a present that no money can buy."

I asked, "What is that present that no money can buy?"

He answered, "Love. Go to your mom, embrace her, and give her a big kiss. Tell her "Mom, I love you".

I did that. I went to my mom, I hugged her and I said, "Mom, I love you, I love you," and I gave her a kiss. I thought "Oh God, I gave the greatest, most precious present on earth to my mom and I didn't need any money for it: I gave her Love." Love indeed cannot be bought with any money. That was my first big lesson in love coming from my father. In my dream I saw my father coming in with his winter coat on, the fur collar was pulled up to his face, and he had a fur cap on his head. He was searching for me. When I spotted him, I prayed to God he should look at me. I asked myself: "How is he going to find me among all these people?" I decided to put my concentration on him, and I looked at him constantly. Surely enough after awhile, he spotted me, and he looked at me. We looked at each other. Then, we tried to reach each other, but the room was filled with people. But only in a dream can you push all the

obstacles aside and run to each other. The people were making place for us. They retracted themselves. Suddenly, I wasn't aware of anyone. I could see only my father coming towards me, and I was going towards him, and all the way, just like in the dream with my mother I was thinking "What will I say to my father when I meet him?" I wanted to tell him so many things. I hadn't seen him for so long, there were so many things happening in my life. Then, at one point, we reached each other and we embraced each other and I felt that my father was so cold. But then, it hit me that my father came from a cold place. I realized, my father was dead. But I didn't care. He was so alive, he looked so alive. As we were embracing each other I could feel him getting warmer and warmer. I warmed him up, I wanted to warm him up, and make him feel comfortable. We were hugging each other for a long time. I felt such a great love emanating from him to me. The same great love was emanating from me to him and a great joy of seeing him. Just like in the dream with my mother, we couldn't say a word to each other. Again, we were communicating with each other on a spiritual level, where you have no words, but your feelings are conveyed. I felt a message coming from him, "I love you, I love you", but also another message came along with it, "Don't ever let love desert your heart. Always have love in your heart, not only for your family but for the world, for every creature in the world. Have respect for life."

We were hugging each other, and tears were running down my cheeks and I could see the tears running down from his eyes. Then, I woke up. I opened my eyes, and the dream was gone but the feeling was still there. The words which were not spoken were etched into my soul. Then, I was thinking: "If I would have been able to talk to my father in my dream, what would I have said to him? And further, if he would have been able to talk, what would he have told me?" I got up, I put on my morning robe. I went to my desk, picked up my pen and paper, and I wrote down this dialogue containing the thoughts and feelings which were unspoken in my dream, the words which manifested themselves in the waking state. That's what I would have told my father, if I would have been able to speak to him in my dream. Here are the words he would have said to me while we were hugging each other. Everything is conveyed here in my poem, entitled "In Your Memory."

Many years ago
A wise man told me:

"Wherever you go, my thoughts will follow-
When pain will grab your soul,
Or sorrows squeeze your heart,
Think of me and you will never fall apart...
My love for you will never die-
I may be soaring above in the blue kingdom of the sky,
My body may be sealed beneath the earth,
But remember
I shared and witnessed your birth-
I will never desert you-
I will watch over you when you are awake or asleep-
I will listen to your voice,
I will weep when you suffer,
And laugh when you rejoice."

Oh, wise man, I know you speak the truth-
I left the border of youth
Standing on the stage of maturity,
Wearing the gray signs
And the dry lines of age-
I understand now
All the teachings
You bestowed upon me
Through the years-
Since you left me
My eyes shed countless drops of tears-
My dear father,
How can I thank you
For all the years of love
Wisdom, guidance, and care?
How can I ever bear

Your absence?
I always feel your presence
For me you never died-
I see you in my dreams
Floating in life's streams-
You are here with me
We never are apart-
Death could never tear you out of my heart-
Wherever your mortal body rests
May be death's domain-
But your spirit will always remain
Buried within me-

My dear father
Wherever you may be,
Under the cold rocks
Or behind a shining star,
I am with you
Wherever you are-
My thoughts will hold forever your image,
And in my eternal pilgrimage
My quest to reach your soul
Will be my highest goal-

Many times I also dreamed about my uncle, who had a great love for me. As I mentioned before, he didn't have any children, so I was his little girl and I can thank him that I returned from the German concentration camps alive, because he taught me to be strong. Many times he said, "It's nice to have spiritual strength, but you need the physical strength along with it." He was so right. I am glad I was a competitive fencer. I am glad that I started fencing when I was five years old. I am glad that I worked up my endurance, so I could survive the German concentration camps. I learned the value of spirituality and of physical fitness. I consider myself fortunate to have had two such wonderful men in my family, my father and my uncle, who gave

me the great heritage and great values in life. They taught me the art of love, compassion, tolerance, and the value of physical fitness. Several years ago I had a very strange dream about my uncle. I know that his spirit is also following me around. In my dream, I was at Miami beach, and I was wondering why I went to Miami beach. I was by myself, and I was wondering where my husband and my family were, because I remembered that we went together. But on that day, I was alone on Miami beach, and I looked at the sidewalk next to the seashore. It was a walkway made out of wood, and it had a fence around it too. It was strange, because I was in Miami beach before but I have never seen this kind of setting. Then, on that wooden platform, I could see my uncle coming. My uncle was a very handsome man, very beautifully built. He was an Olympic athlete. In my dream, he was still the handsome, well built Olympic athlete. It was strange that he was covered with mud. My uncle was a very neat man, he took pride in his appearance. He always wanted to give a good example of being strong, well built physically. He was a neat, intelligent man, very ambitious and courageous. When I saw him in my dream it seemed to me that his spirit was somewhat broken. He moved slowly. He usually was always walking vigorously in a fast pace. He was covered with mud. I was wondering, "What happened to my uncle? Where was he?" I never have seen him looking like this. He came along the walkway, stopped, and was facing me. I was so happy to see him. Again, like in so many of my dreams, I did not realize he was dead. I was just wondering where he came from, and why he had so much dirt on him.

He looked at me, and I said, "Oh, I'm so glad to see you, I haven't seen you for years. You never came to see me."

He stopped and he said, "I did, I did come to see you. I was looking for you."

"How did you know that I am here?"

"I know more than you think that I know. I'm always with you." Then, as he was standing on that platform, the fence disappeared, and he walked up to me.

"Uncle, I am so happy to see you." I embraced him although he was covered with mud. Little did I care. I said, "Tell me, where were you? How did you get into this mess? Where are you living? Where were you through all these years?"

"Do you want to find out where I am living? Then come with me."

So we were walking together and suddenly Miami beach completely disappeared and we were walking on a barren surface for a while. Then, I could see from far, a single big, beautiful,

huge tree. I followed my uncle and we came to a place where the only beautiful thing was that tree. Everything looked so barren, so desolate. It was a muddy road. As we went on this muddy road, we came to a place where there were rectangular holes in the ground that looked like beds of mud.

My uncle said to me, "That's where I live."

"How could you live in such a place? Why? Why did you select to live here?"

"I didn't select it, but I had no choice. Do you want to see where my place is? See that big tree, that's the only beautiful thing around me. I was fortunate to have my place by the trunk of the tree."

"Uncle, it's terrible. I want to take you away from here. Don't live here. It's like a mud hole where you live."

"You can call it a mud hole, but this is my place, where I have to live forever."

"Why? You can come with me."

"Don't you understand that I cannot come with you? This is where I sleep. This is where I rest and I have rested here for a long time."

"What is it like to live in a place like this?"

"Do you really love me?"

"You know, I always loved you. I will love you even if you live in this mud hole. I don't care. I want to understand you. Why? Why do you live here? What does it feel like to live here in this big isolated place? It looks so sad. It looks so dead. And it looks so desolate."

"It does. You want to know what it is really like? Do you really love me to the point where you can understand what it feels like to live here?

"Yes."

"Then you have to do something for me. See this mud hole next to me? You have to lie down and feel what it is like to lie in this mud and I will lie next to you, and you can tell me what you feel."

Surely I was reluctant to do that, but I loved my uncle dearly and I would do anything for him to help him. So I laid down in that mud. Naturally I was covered with mud, and it was cold, uncomfortable, and messy.

"What does it feel like?"

"Uncle, if you really love me you have to get away from here."

"You still don't know what it feels like and what I have to put up with here."

"With what?"

"Do you love me? Do you want to find out?"

"Yes"

"Then you have to stay here until night falls."

Naturally, I was very reluctant to do that, but I wanted to find out what happens at night fall. What does my uncle try to relate to me? What is it? I was lying next to my uncle, and we were talking.

"Do you still like to fence? I was so proud of you. Remember when you won that little gold medal, and you were fencing with boys? Remember what you said to me when you were twelve years old and your breasts were growing? You said "Uncle I cannot fence anymore, it hurts." Remember I taught you to fence with the foil because the saber was too harsh for you? Do you remember when I got you that extra padding for your chest?"

"I do, I do."

"I was so proud of you, so proud of you."

We were talking and I was telling him all what happened to me through the years and I was telling him about the German concentration camps."

"I'm so glad that you survived, because do you realize I didn't, and your father didn't."

In that moment I realized that my uncle was dead, and this was the grave where he was. I experienced the coldness of the grave, the ultimate fate of man and I was terrified, I was shivering, I was cold.

"Don't be afraid, I want to give you a message. I want you to learn something about death."

Then, when night fall came, I could see the sinister looking swordsmen coming out of the darkness wearing the masks of death. I was wondering if they were the representatives of death. I could see them coming towards me. I had no defense against them.

"Uncle am I going to die? Am I going to join you? This is death coming to take my life."

"Don't be afraid."

In that moment I could see my uncle getting out of the grave, and suddenly there was no mud on him anymore, but I could see the saber in his hand. I could see him dressed in his

fencing uniform, the fencing shield on his head. He was a fencing champion of Romania. I could see him challenging the shadows of death. He was fencing with the dark specters of oblivion.

"Uncle, uncle, you can't win. There are too many."

"Don't be afraid, don't be afraid. I am going to be the winner. I challenged death before, I fight with death every single night. This is my life, here."

Then I could see my uncle fencing with all the shadows of death and defeating every single one. Every single one fell on the ground. My uncle was still dressed in his fencing uniform like I have seen him in the competitions. He won so many competitions, he had so many medals and all kinds of trophies.

"Uncle, I admire you even in death. I always admired you, but I never thought that you could challenge death. You are the greatest fencer on earth."

He stood before me, "Get up."

He started cleaning me, and all the mud and dirt on me disappeared.

"Uncle, now I understand that you are destined to stay here and continue fencing with the most fearsome and powerful opponents. In the domain of death each day you face the toughest competitors. Your greatest challenge is death itself."

"Now you see. You see why I stay here. This is the only thing I like here; to fence with the specters of death. I don't know if I will always be victorious, but I will fight with them constantly and I will try my best to be the winning champion of the dead. Your place isn't here, but I wanted you to understand me. I know that you've mourned me for years and years. I want you to leave and know that I am not totally unhappy. But there is something I want to tell you before I leave. Remember, don't be afraid wherever you are, and wherever you are going to be. You should know that the spirit of your uncle is always with you, to protect you, to fight for you and to guide you, even beyond the grave. Now, let's go back together."

He took my hand, and I walked with him hand in hand. I looked up at him.

"Uncle, I love you, I love you. I knew through all these years that your spirit was always with me."

"I love you too. My spirit will always follow you. I may be deep in the ground but my spirit will always follow you around."

Then he disappeared. I was alone on the beach again. I was standing for a long time on

the beach, on the front of the wooden platform. After the fence disappeared the whole platform gradually vanished. I was alone. Then, I woke up. I woke up and I felt such a terrible sadness, such a terrible feeling of loss, like I lost part of myself. I was thinking of my uncle. The picture of my uncle, of my father, and of my mother are hanging on the bedroom wall facing my bed. There is also a picture of me with my mother and my father when I was five years old. I hung these pictures in such a way that when I go to bed I can look at them. They're enlarged photos so I can see clearly the faces of my loved ones. As I woke up, my eyes fell on the pictures and I knew that their spirits were around in my room and they're going to stay with me. Their spirits are buried into my soul, their spiritual resting place, and they will live within me as long as there is life within me. You never overcome the loss of your loved ones. You mourn them forever. But it is a comforting feeling that they are with you. You can feel them although you cannot see them. There is a sensation, a feeling that they are there and they read your thoughts, and they manifest themselves in your dreams. That's the only place where you can see them and communicate with them.